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Professor Joshua Lederberg
The Rockefeller University
1230 York Avenue
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Dear Josh,

I hope you don't mind too much if I bother you with the request below.

I have been asked to write a brief retrospective article about the early work with P1 and P2, and I'd like to tell why - unlike almost everyone else - I did not end up working with lambda. My recollection of those beginnings is as follows.

When I joined Luria (October 1949) at Bloomington, I told him I was curious about lysogeny and would like to work on it. He was not too happy about it, probably because that topic was not included in his research grant program, but he was helpful nevertheless and promised he would try to get hold of some known lysogenic strains, which he did with your help. In fact, in January 1950 we received from you two lambda susceptible strains that you or Esther had isolated from K-12, plus the Lisbonne lysogen with its *Shigella* indicator. I immediately started working with all these strains. A few weeks later, Luria met you at some meeting, and reported that you and Esther would have much preferred if I did not work on lambda. I remember being rather displeased at the time, although I recognized that your request was within your rights, as the isolation of the lambda susceptible strains was still an unpublished result. Luria, Jim Watson and I were sharing a small laboratory and we had a serious discussion on how to proceed in view of your request, with Jim screaming that he would not want to be in a lab where one used routinely the presumably pathogenic *Shigella*... Anyhow, Luria convinced me to leave lambda alone, at least for a time, and I accepted the challenge of using some extra care in handling *Shigella*. What happened of course is that while I left lambda alone, Jean Weigle apparently did not have the same restraint and over a brief period of time enthusiastically distributed the lambda indicators to a number of laboratories.

What I would like to know from you is whether you can confirm Luria's story and whether you recall any particulars of your exchanges with him on the subject. Specifically, I'm trying to establish more precisely the time when Jean Weigle and Max Delbrück started working with lambda, and I am also now wondering whether perhaps Luria himself was reluctant at having someone in his laboratory start working on the same material as Max and Jean.

If you do have any surviving recollection of these events, I'd be very interested in knowing. Were I to quote you in that case, I'd let you have a copy of the manuscript before submitting it.

My current e-mail address is <gbertani@earthlink.net>.

With kind regards,

Joe

PS. Independently of the above story, and suspecting that you might have some interest in the philosophy of science, I'm enclosing a manuscript (still unpublished, but currently on the Web): don't feel obliged to read it, if you don't care about the topic.